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ABSTRACT

In this brief oral history, the life of Fidelia Adams Johnson is recounted with sections devoted to her family background, formative years, college experience, working life and retirement years as a black woman of influence. Her grandfather helped establish Tuskegee Institute and her father founded Louisiana's Grambling State College. Fidelia graduated from Tuskegee. Later, in addition to serving as basketball coach at Grambling State, she was responsible for the establishment of their home economics department. (PR)

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FIDELIA ADAMS JOHNSON: INGENIOUS DAUGHTER OF THE FOUNDER OF GRAMBLING STATE UNIVERSITY

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FIDELIA ADAMS JOHNSON: INGENIOUS DAUGHTER OF
THE FOUNDER OF GRAMBLING STATE UNIVERSITY

This paper provides a well researched oral history product which results in a biographical sketch emphasizing educational achievement and educational determination for herself and others. Her life story clearly demonstrates qualities of self-discipline, hard work, a value and belief system that promotes self worth, human dignity, dedication, self perseverance, and accomplishment.

Her most significant achievements include the assuming of all major family responsibilities as a nine years old child, the financing of her education, her sister and brothers in Tuskegee, Alabama, which required enormous physical exertion and enumerable exhausting hours. Yet she finished high school as valedictorian of her class and four years of college with honors. She had the distinction of being in the first four-year college class to be graduated from Tuskegee. Such strategem was displayed in her participation in sports while in Tuskegee and later when she served as girls' basketball coach for about twenty years at Grambling State University along with many other university responsibilities that she was inducted in the Athletics Hall of Fame in Tuskegee in 1976. She was instrumental in helping to bring to fruition a Grambling College dream of a much needed viable, timely Home Economics curricula by planning and executing the creation of the Home Economics Department evolving from domestic science with degrees in Home Economics Education, Institution Management, Early Childhood Education, and the establishment of a nursery school.

Her aims and ambitions were a part of the aspiration/leadership conspiracy of a grandiose educational dream. Her grandfather, Lewis Adams, helped established Tuskegee Institute by being the spokesman of three commissioners who contacted Hampton Institute in Virginia to send Dr. Booker T. Washington to Tuskegee, Alabama to serve as its first principal. The story of Dr. Washington's role at Tuskegee is universially known. She received instructions and the blessings from such teachers as Mrs. Booker T. Washington, Mrs. Jennie C. Moten, and others who believed in the concept of hard work, and integrity supported by the old philosophy where there appears to be no way, find or make one.

Her father, Charles P. Adams sent by Dr. Washington to Grambling, is credited with the founding of Grambling State University, a struggle initiated in 1901. Today the institution has become internationally known and impacts significantly upon urban population as well as rural since the student population is most cosmopolitan with Nigerians, Mexicans, Caucasians, Orientals, Indians, etc., all represented on this campus because of the widespread knowledge of its role in international sports, marching band as well as its fine academic program. The lives of these students through the years have been touched in meaningful positive ways by Mama Fie as she is affectionately called. She has no children of her own though married for forty-five years.

Her dedication, involvement, caring, and spirit, is a model for all women irrespective of ethnicity who believe in striving for worthwhile goals closely aligned with human worth, respect and dignity. Her struggle represents the

struggle of many women today. We need more Fidelia Adams Johnsons today, to bring about better educational opportunities for women. We need better informed women to deal with unemployment of women--especially black women because there is yet plenty to do.

FIDELIA ADAMS JOHNSON: INGENIOUS DAUGHTER OF
THE FOUNDER OF GRAMBLING STATE UNIVERSITY

Since the days of Herodotus (c.490-c.430 B.C.), the accepted father of history, one of the major purposes of the historian has been to record the deeds of human action so that posterity will not forget. It is, therefore, incumbent upon this historian to record and preserve in the annals of state and national history the story of Fidelia Adams Johnson as her background and life story are indeed a very historically unique saga. Very definitely, the birthright of all posterity, particularly those in the south and especially the state of Louisiana, should include the privilege to share this true story of self-discipline, rigorous work ethos, adjustments, adaptations, innovations, and love for humanity. Interwoven is a wondrous sense of humility as she used obstacle after obstacle as stepping stones to achieve milestone after milestone that carved a worthy niche in the annals of time and history.

Brief Family Background

Fidelia Adams Johnson was molded in the clay of challenge and historical immortality. She is a granddaughter of Lewis Adams, who though born a slave on a plantation in Macon County, Alabama, October 27, 1842, mastered tinsmithing, saddlemaking, and shoemaking. He learned to read and write from the completed lessons of the plantation owner's children who were being instructed by a tutor.

With the abolition of slavery in 1865, and realizing that "colored people" in that area needed assistance in many avenues of life, Lewis Adams and his wife, Sallie Green Adams, went to the town of Tuskegee and started, on or near the present site of the town square, a business that included the three mentioned trades. In addition, they began to teach these trades to a number of

young men in the area. His wife, Sallie, mother of eventually sixteen children, taught cooking, sewing, and homemaking to interested young women.

Both business and the educational thrust thrived, and it soon became evident to the Adams that individual efforts were not enough to satisfy the needs for vocational training and literacy in the area. Therefore, being a deacon and Sunday school superintendent in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Lewis Adams took advantage of his position as a leading "colored" citizen in the area to get the Education Committee of the Alabama Legislature to pass House Bill Number 165. It was signed by the Governor of that time, Rufus W. Cobb, February 12, 1881, establishing Tuskegee State Normal School and provided $2,000 annually for its support.

As the most literate of the three original commissioners designated to supervise the infant school, Fidelia's grandfather was instrumental by writing General Armstrong at Hampton Institute, Virginia, in securing, in 1881, a young teacher from Hampton Institute as the first principal--Booker T. Washington. Thus, was born the present world renowned Tuskegee Institute of Alabama. Lewis Adams' outstanding initiative, personal concern, extraordinary leadership abilities, and distinguished service to the area won for him many honors, many of which his granddaughter, Fidelia, has been privileged to share. For example, on November 3, 1973, Fidelia accompanied her sister, Theresa, and two first cousins, Pearl Washington and Byrdie Crawford, to attend the memorial service and dedication of the Lewis Adams Building on the campus of Tuskegee and receive keys to the city. Also, in April of 1978, a portrait of her grandfather will be unveiled and placed in the state archives in Montgomery, Alabama.

There was another slave, Mrs. Mariah Woods, who was sold in slavery from Virginia to South Louisiana (West Baton Rouge Parish, at a place called Brusly); little did she or anyone else ever dream or realize that her arrival would ultimately set into motion a chain of events that would also mold historical

immortality. Mrs. Woods had seven children, five daughters and two sons by master Jim Woods. The third oldest child, Mary, married Edward Adams (no relation to Lewis Adams) and became the mother of four boys. The first born was Charles Phillip Adams, who entered this world on July 21, 1873, destined to become Fidelia's father. Due to an unfortunate, tragic death of Charles P's mother, he was reared by his grandmother, Mariah Woods. Here, he was surrounded by an atmosphere of thrift, hard work, love, integrity, and respectability.

Although by the mid-1890's Charles P. with the help of an uncle had established a secure postion as a cane and crop farmer in the area, for him it was not enough. Even though he was twenty-one years old, late in his life to begin college by the usual present day standards, he decided to enter Tuskegee, as he had an everlasting thirst for education. He had heard about Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute from a young man who had received a catalog.

Charles, a young man of perseverance, tenacity, and physical stamina, not only achieved in the physical work arena, but he also drew attention to his mental prowess by his deep commitment to academic excellence. He mastered well the ability to think critically and was influenced by personalities of such great statue as Dr. Booker T. Washington, Dr. George Washington Carver, and Mrs. B. K. Bruce (wife of the one-time Senator). Perhaps the above qualities, in addition to his ability to persuade and influence discouraged students to remain in the institution when they were seriously considering leaving, and his being a native of Louisiana were all forces providing the magnetic field that caused President Booker T. Washington to select Charles P. upon the receipt of a letter from citizens of Grambling, Louisiana asking for a man to be sent from Tuskegee to help establish an industrial school in Grambling, Louisiana. Charles P. promised Dr. Washington, a man for whom he had the utmost and complete admiration and respect, that he would come. After

graduation from Tuskegee, Charles P. returned to his home in south Louisiana and was tempted to remain. However, his total commitment to Dr. Washington prevailed, and Charles P. Adams came to the Grambling area on August 4, 1901.

Remembering Lewis and Sallie Green Adams and their sixteen children, one daughter, Martha Norman Adams now figures significantly in the amazing saga of Fidelia Adams. Charles P. soon found that he needed help in this school that he was modeling after Tuskegee, and he requested that a teacher be sent from Tuskegee to teach Domestic Science. Miss Martha Adams was sent; and thus, she was the first to develop the Domestic Science Program of the school. About the year 1904, Mr. Charles P. Adams, the founder of Grambling State University, married Miss Adams, daughter of Lewis Adams and they continued as parents not only of an institution, but of six children. Fidelia was the first born.

The Formative Years (1905-1922)

Due to the limited facilities in rural Grambling, Louisiana, Charles P. Adams sent his wife, Martha, to his home in Brusley, Louisiana (West Baton Rouge Parish) a month before confinement. Consequently, Fidelia was born April 17, 1905, in Brusley rather than in Grambling. This baby and mother returned to Grambling as soon as the time was feasible health-wise, for Martha Adams was much needed on campus to continue her leadership in developing what was to become the Home Economics Department.

Fidelia (or "Olin" as she was called by many at that time) had no option but to mature quickly. Her mother had exhausting academic responsibilities, yet her family grew "fast": a son, Charles P., Jr. died; Charles P., Jr. II was born May, 1907; a daughter, Theresa, was born February, 1909; sons, Edward H. was born August, 1910; Henry V., July, 1912; and Ralph L., November, 1916.

Although young in years, Olin's perceptive mind made her realize that even though some concerned, sympathetic women of the community would come in from

time to time to help her mother, she would have to be the main stay in the household. Her body also responded to this need, for early she matured physically. It was said that she was "big' for her age. She helped with the babies, washed, cooked, served meals and began formal school training at the proper time while the father farmed and was about his business of developing a viable institution.

Fidelia (Olin) began her formal education in Grambling at the site of the Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial Institute. She remained there until the fifth or sixth grade when the Parish decreed that grades from one through five should remain at the Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial Institute, and the upper grades to the tenth would attend Allen Green Academy.[1] Because of the intense friction between the Allen Green Baptist faction and the Grambling vocation faction, the students from Grambling would daily find the doors to Allen Green Baptist "boarded up" to keep them out. Lafayette Richmond, a supporter of the Adams faction, would get tools and open the doors so the Grambling students could get in and get at the business of learning. This practice stopped within a year when it was decided that Allen Green would continue as a private church school and Grambling would move toward parish and state orientation following the basic tenets of Tuskegee. Then the Grambling students returned to the Grambling site. These schenanigans were humorous to Fidelia at the time, but later in Tuskegee she realized with regret that much time was wasted.

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[1]Allen Green Academy was the school that Mr. Adams first came to assist in development. After four years from 1901-1905, the conflict between the faction that desired Allen Green to become a Baptist school and the faction that wanted the school developed in a vocational manner caused Mr. Adams, leader of the vocational movement, to move from the Allen Green community to the present site of Grambling. It was at this site that Fidelia began her education.

In the meantime as has been mentioned, Fidelia grew up learning how to work as well as going to school. Her daddy was totally committed to the work ethos of Booker T. Washington. By nine years of age, Fidelia was getting up at five o'clock a.m. and preparing breakfast for all to get out to work on time and those who had to get to school on time, including herself. She had to help discipline the younger ones, learn to sew, even work in the fields; but it was soon decided that she was of more value in the household than in the field for by this time with the academic work and the babies, Mrs. Adams was much in need of Fidelia in the household. During the day women in the community, especially "Aunt Mealie Moore" and "Aunt Easter Moore" would "help out" sometimes (these persons were called "aunt" by the community, no relation to the Adams'). Fidelia remained the main cook and seamtress even as her sister grew up. Her sister, Theresa's role was to clean the house.

Though school and physical work claimed much of Fidelia's time, there was recreation to be enjoyed in the rural area. Fidelia, being more mature mentally and physically than most of her age, ran with children older than she. They played ring games, hunted, fished rambled in the woods, and picked seasonal berries. Qualities of leadership were exemplified early. Her peers followed her in activities as if all games were "follow the leader." As she continued to mature socially, meeting the trains was the "in thing," though there was no station. From the platform, they would wave at the people and the regular personnel on the train. The porters knew them and rewarded them with candy, etc. The big plus was the courting under the platform. According to Fidelia, social action for the youth was very conservative and dancing was taboo. But she could play a little on the piano, and at socials couples would march to the music rather than dance. The old wind-up phonograph was also a source of enjoyment. Sports in the form of baseball developed early in the Grambling community, and was attended by people in the surrounding vicinity such as

Arcadia and Ruston. Fidelia and sports became imbued with one another both as a spectator and a participant (played first base). It was to be an everlasting romance. She was admitted to the Tuskegee Athletic Hall of Fame on October 26, 1976, and the romance continues.

The Tuskegee Years (1922-1929)

After completing the tenth grade, which was the terminal diploma at Grambling in 1922, Fidelia was taken to Tuskegee by her mother to complete her high school training. It was here that Fidelia (Olin) became "Fie." Her intentions were to specialize in the Nursing curriculum, but after serious discussion with her mother, Fie decided to specialize in Girl Industries. Foods was her strongest area, but she also won prizes in sewing. Fie had had experience in sewing as she had in the past helped her mother "make over" clothes for members of the family. Of course, her daddy was too large to ever have anything made over for him. These clothes were sent by sympathetic, well-to-do-patrons of the school, especially Miss Fidelia Jewett, a philanthropist from San Francisco, California, who had befriended Grambling and the Adams family since 1902. Fidelia was named for this generous lady.

Booker T. Washington believed in work. "Work with pay, work without pay."[2] Fie's mother and daddy had inhaled deeply of this philosophy, and she had been brought up to work. Her home responsibilities in Grambling had provided an orientation that many students did not have. Since she was on very friendly terms with work, facing definite assigned responsibilities did not elicit the frustration and attempts to circumvent the delineated work program as it did with some other students.

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[2]Quoted in Charles P. Adams' The Story of My Life's Work, Chapter Three, page 29. (Unpublished Manuscript)

Fie worked in the school laundry, the dining hall, and in the domitories. These jobs were needed because there was little cash to be shared from home, since many students paid their school fees in Grambling with syrup, pork, vegetables, almost anything except money. Her mother had a small grocery store near her house, which brought in a small amount of cash. Her entrance fees were paid, but very little else.

Temptations were ever present. Students seeking to lead others astray were no different on the campus of Tuskegee than on any other campus. Slipping off to Montgomery, Atlanta, staying out past the designated time, not completing work assignments properly, etc. were all part of the scene. In addition, there were more exciting people with whom to come in contact, people whose influence could prove to be negative as well as positive upon her character and academic performance. But Fie's christian home training and the influence and inspiration of her favorite teacher, Mrs. Ophelia Pearson (died the summer of 1977) and Mrs. Booker T. Washington among other things helped make Fie a student whom all could respect.

This energetic young woman engaged in many activities. She excelled in all her studies except music; in this she was like her father. Fie admits that money spent on music was wasted unless channeled directly to the music teacher as she would eat it up in fig newtons and cheese. It was also recognized by the choir director that she had a very good alto voice and wanted her to sing in the choir; but Fie would dodge, if any way possible, anything to do with music. Her favorite escape was sports for which she had long since developed a keen appreciation and enjoyed avidly. She played basketball with such clever stratagem that she was lettered four years, was on the track team, the javelin team, and played some tennis. She enjoyed the concerts (as long as she did not have to participate), weekend movies and joined some clubs. She was a leader

in the Young Woman's Christian Association, the Louisiana Club (each state with several students had an organized club) and won honors on the debating team.

She spent many hours with Mrs. Booker T. Washington, the Director of Girl Industries. In addition to the professional relationship, Mrs. Washington became aware of the fact that Fie knew how to hitch a horse to a buggy. Fie reports that students who did not know Mrs. Washington would think that she was mean because of her heavy voice and she arbitrarily called young women "little girl." Some students from rural areas denied their rural background, but Fie admitted hers and when asked if she could hitch a horse and buggy, she replied in the affirmative. Mrs. Washington told her to go and hitch hers and bring it back to Dorothy Hall, the Home Economics Building. No directions of where to go or which way to get there was given. In fact, it is reported that she just told one what to do without ever giving directions. Hitching the horse and buggy and taking Mrs. Washington for frequent rides through the campus, the community, and even the surrounding vicinity opened new doors of contact and information for Fie as well as kindled a very close relationship between the two.

Fie completed her high school years at Tuskegee as valedictorian in 1925. She had not been able to return home at all during that time as she worked summers as well as the regular terms. Fie knew that she would continue her education, and that same year two years of college was added to the Tuskegee curriculum. A liberal arts teacher of English wanted Fie to go to Fisk in Nashville, Tennessee; however, Mrs. Ophelia Pearson, her favorite teacher and Mrs. Booker T. Washington, her mentor and friend, persuaded her to remain at Tuskegee. Fie came home after graduation, but she promised Mrs. Washington that she would return to Tuskegee in the fall. That summer, Mrs. Washington, Director of Girl Industries and wife of Booker T. Washington died. Mrs. Jennie C. Moten became head of the newly named Home Economics Department.

Fie's major problem in Tuskegee was lack of finance; and when her brother, Charles, Jr. came, things were even rougher in that Charles, Jr. liked to tinker and spent so much of his time in the auto shop that he did little to subsidize his education. Fie continued to work in the dining hall, the dormitory, and in the laundry. Her ironing was so beautiful that the president of Tuskegee by that time, President Robert Moten, would not let anyone else iron his shirts. In this way, Fie would always know when President Moten was on or off campus. During her first two college years, 1925-1927, Fie was made supervisor of the laundry; but she still ironed President Moten's shirts.

This talented and versatile young woman was in the first college graduating class of 1927; and at this time, two more years of college were added to the Tuskegee curriculum. Also another Adams, sister Theresa, began to matriculate at Tuskegee. Fie's position in the dormitory became that of resident counselor. Her last two promotions offered more pay, but the financial situation at home was still tight; and before Fie graduated in the first four-year college class in 1929, Ed came making four Adams in Tuskegee at one time. In her last year, things eased a bit financially. She worked the last two summers teaching geography and history classes at Grambling which paid more than her campus jobs. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Home Economics, with honors in 1929.

Developmental Years at Grambling (1929-1936)

After graduating in the first four-year college class at Tuskegee Institute, Fie returned to Grambling. The institution in 1928, was labeled a state junior college, but finance was still such a problem that personnel was severely limited and supplies woefully inadequate.

Because of limited personnel and inadequate supplies, Fie was forced to assume job assignments other than those related to her major, home economics;

and she had to improvise in many ways to implement the objectives of the various programs. She could not afford to fail. Her mother and father were depending upon her academically; and the three younger Adams at Tuskegee, to a great extent, were depending upon her financially for cash and clothing. Her sister would write to Fie for assistance (money and clothes) rather than her mother. So without complaining, Fie vigorously attacked her major assignments which were to teach foods and clothing, do some teacher training, and generally help her mother in home economics or domestic science as it was called then; coach girls basketball (which she did for nearly twenty years always producing top-rank contenders and sometimes champions); help with planning the meals for students in the dining hall (she became director of the dining hall); and serve as Dean of Women.

Fie was working steadily, but she did not have much money; and what she earned, she had to share with the younger ones, and to help keep the department progressing. Therefore, unconventional strategies had to be devised. Food was no problem for the course in foods because of the farms in the area. Pork, which had been carefully preserved, was plentiful. Beef was killed when needed as adequate refrigeration was still a luxury that the department did not possess. Milk, chickens, eggs, and vegetables were all available when needed. The course in clothing was different; she had little money and most students had less; therefore, flour and feed sacks were collected and sometimes bought by the bundles. Donated used clothes were remade and altered. For instance, students were taught how to make clothes for the young or little children from tails of men's shirts. Brown domestic, which was cheaper than white, was purchased and bleached.

Sometimes when "make-do was done" and actual money was needed for cloth or other wearing apparel for use in the course and even for the family, Fie

would get her brothers up before day (this would be in the summer when they were home to help harvest the crops) to pick a wagon of cotton, go to the gin, sell it, and get back before their daddy would know they had gone. This money was used to assist in cloth and clothes buying. Charles P., Sr. was high on education as far as tuition, board, etc., but very frugal when it came to obtaining clothes. Therefore, the siblings thought to steal a little cotton from their daddy was justifiable, since it ultimately assisted in the education process. To Fie, the end justified the means, and she had so much to do with so little.

Though extremely busy, Fie found time to court a young athlete from Natchitoches whom she met on the campus. Ozias Johnson was a star basketball player and Fie was coaching girls basketball, so mutual attraction seemed to exist. When Ozias finished Grambling in 1931-1932, he also went to Tuskegee and completed his college work in 1934. Upon his return, Fie and Ozias were married. They are at this time still married having been committed to each other for forty-four years. Because Fie became mother to so many people, though having no children of her own, she became known as "Mama Fie." She is yet known as Mama Fie by many throughout this nation.

College Years (1936-1970)

When Fie returned to Grambling in 1929, the school's major thrust was to train elementary teachers for small rural schools. In 1936, under the administration of the new president, Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones, the program was reorganized to emphasize rural teacher education. The significant features of this program at this time were (1) the close coordination of the teacher-education program with the state, parish, and federal agencies of health, agriculture, trade and industry, and home economics; (2) apprentice teaching; (3) field service; (4) curriculum laboratory; (5) coordination of the Jeanes

teachers with the college program; (6) the summer school; and (7) the instructional part of the program.

Fie was a key figure in launching at Grambling College, in 1936, a unique Field Service Program to help implement one thrust of the teacher education program. Working to implement this thrust was really a challenge which she accepted with fervor. Fie had noted that the family background of many of her students made motivation very difficult as many had low aspiration levels and were, as we would put it today, very disadvantaged at home. It had kept her sedulously trying to devise ways to set up meaningful learning situations for her students on campus. She knew that this field service program would, by taking education out of the classroom to communities of North Louisiana, realistically improve family life in the community, though the take would not be easy.

North Louisiana was divided into eight regions which contained centers. These centers were staffed with a parish supervisor, a teacher trainer, and the team. The team was usually composed of a person in agriculture, a nurse, a person in education and one in home economics. Mama Fie was the one in home economics. College aged students would enroll at the center for a three hour course at Grambling College. The course was called Rural Life Problems. They would work the first year at the center and in the community, and then come to Grambling and finish the last year. The team supervisor and teacher trainer would also work with adults in the community and at the center.

Team members rotated after about two or three weeks from center to center staying in homes of people in the community. They also held evening and night classes. Since so many rural homes had only one room, Mama Fie was particularly interested in teaching residents how to petition the room with boxes, crates or "whatever" to provide privacy. Another thing she taught them was how to have mattresses that slept good and smelled sweet. They would buy mattress ticking

and make the cover, then each season put fresh hay in it. Those who used cotton did not have to change the inside as often. In lieu of box springs and mattresses, some put the hay mattress on the bottom and a cotton mattress on top. They prepared and sent bulletins and other helpful communications to areas, geared to meet the specific needs of the community as had been revealed by their surveys. Activities of the Field Service Program attracted widespread attention and did indeed improve community living.

Fie continued her very busy schedule. Her husband, becoming Post-Master of Grambling in 1935, forced even more responsibilities upon her. Ozias was and still is an ardent lover of the outdoors. Although he had no helper, he would leave the post office to go hunting or fishing; and Fie would have to go to the post office and complete his assigned duties. This practice continued until 1942, when Ozias entered World War II. When he returned in 1945, he began to do what he enjoyed doing for an occupation--coaching. The many trophies in his home for basketball honors attest to his success in that area.

In the early thirties, Martha Adams retired; and Fie was in full command of continuing the development of the Home Economics curricula, though she had not been relieved of too many other duties. It should be remembered that in 1936 when Grambling became a college, elementary and high school were on campus all together. This situation initiated problems for the developing department as a college curriculum in Home Economics was trying to unfold. Technically, in 1978, all classes are still on Grambling State University's campus in as much as the Laboratory schools, both elementary and high school, though in separate facilities, are supervised by the College of Education and the buildings are in easy walking distance from any point on the main campus.

Remarkable growth in Home Economics area was evidenced by the late forties. In 1936, Grambling did not offer a Bachelor of Arts degree in Home Economics. Students just took a competency in Home Economics by taking a certain number of

hours which would allow them to teach, but Fie was not satisfied. During this time, she was also teaching Adult Education to people in the community. She taught them how to can meats, vegetables, and fruit. She shared other knowledge and continued to aid in the improving of family life. Yet, Fie knew that the curriculum could and must be improved. She started with herself. She began further training in 1940, the same year that her brother, Charles P., Jr. died, by attending summer school sessions at the University of Iowa. She realized that "the times" demanded more education, and she wanted desperately to update the department to the point that a credible B. S. degree in Home Economics could be offered. She attended summer sessions until she completed her Masters of Science degree in 1945.

Other difficulties and problems had to be alleviated. Certain conditions had to be met to enable the curriculum to become standardized. Additional faculty had to be obtained. Mrs. Marie Sandle, the wife of the current Dean of General Studies, joined the Home Economics faculty. Efforts were begun to "weed out" the high school students and bring in college students. This took a long time, but by 1949,[3] this determined woman and her supporters were able to offer a degree program in Home Economics. In 1953, nine girls graduated in the first class.

Getting a B. S. degree in Home Economics had been difficult, but Mama Fie felt that it was worth it. (Fie was dubbed Mama Fie in the early forties). So convinced was she that Grambling's Home Economics program needed to keep expanding to train students to help others, that in 1959, this seemingly indefatigable woman began to think in terms of and making plans to begin a

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[3]Actually, it was not until 1940, that a four-year program was inaugurated and the first Bachelor of Science degrees in Elementary Education were granted in 1944. The State Board of Education granted the institution approval to prepare high school teachers in 1948.

nursery school. She returned to the University of Iowa and took some special courses. She already had a minor in Child Development. She also critically observed how the nursery school itself was set up on that campus.

Irrespective of problems of standardization, needed faculty and certain definite facilities, with little money, the Nursery School opened the year, 1952-1953. A young woman from Hampton Institute joined Mama Fie in this effort. After she left the present Dr. Lucy McIntosh, of the Sociology Department and wife of the present Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, took over the supervision of Nursery School. Mama Fie had been and was still busy trying to cope with the problem of facility or lack of it. They moved some old frame buildings that provided good materials to build the required two rooms. They needed a unit for food for the children. Until they finally obtained a small kitchen, they served juices. By this time another frame Home Economics Building had been put together from other old frame buildings. Incidentally, Mama Fie has now the added responsibility of serving as Director of a Lunch Room Program to feed high school students. Efforts "to weed them out" had not been successful as yet. It was only when a separate unit was built was the problem solved.

Desiring Grambling's Home Economic curricula to be timely, Fie always endeavored to take advantage of current trends in the preparation of teachers. She wanted Grambling's Home Economics curriculum to embrace the needs of students. In an effort to offer them skills and knowledge needed in the world of work, Fie attended Antioch College, Michigan State University, and national, state, and regional meetings for continued professional growth. She never wanted to slip into the rut of mental stagnation. Plans were now made to offer a degree in Institution Management. The State Department of Education worked closely with Grambling in developing this curriculum. The program was approved in 1954. Mrs. Edna Willis, the current Dietician and Assistant Manager of

McCall Hall, the cafeteria, was a graduate in the first (1959) graduation commencement for Institution Management.

The excitement of progress and productivity was gratifying. Students' productivity was gratifying. Students not only in North and South Louisiana, but students from other states were hearing about the Home Economics curricula at Grambling. With a Bachelor of Science degree in Home Economics, a Nursery School, a Bachelor of Science degree in Institution Management; plans were being made to offer another curriculum in Home Economics. Surely, Mrs. Martha Adams must have been gratified and intensely proud to witness the evolution of the department from Domestic Science to a bonafide Home Economics Department. Daughter, Fie, building upon her dreams and foundation, innovating, and improvising along the way allowed her mother, who passed in 1956, to see and know that indeed most of her dreams had become a reality.

Lest we forget, much of this time, Mama Fie was Dining Hall Director. She brought in Mrs. Mildred Moss to assist her. They were the first to change student food service from "family style" to a semi-cafeteria service. This was done 1949-1950. Mama Fie left the Dining Hall temporarily, but she was recalled at various intervals. In fact, she was director again just before she retired. Mrs. Moss returned to the Home Economics Department. The last curriculum in Home Economics that Mama Fie was instrumental in developing for approval by the State Board was Early Childhood Education. It was not developed in the College of Education, but as a curriculum in Home Economics. It was Mama Fie who set up the meeting with Dean Earl Lester Cole, who later became Vice President of Instruction and retired June 1977, representatives from Home Economics and Ms. Lela Tomlinson of the State Board. Ms. Tomlinson had worked with Grambling and Fie to get this curriculum approved, which was realized the year, 1966-1967.

Dr. Helen Richards, a Grambling graduate, one of Fie's ace basketball players when she was in school and head of Elementary Education, desired that the Early Childhood Education curriculum be placed under the umbrella of the Education Department. However, the curriculum remained housed in Home Economics until 1972, two years after Mama Fie retired.

Most of the years that were spent in developing a credible, viable approved curricula under the umbrella of Home Economics were spent in pieced over, matched up, second-hand frame buildings. Before Fie retired, she was privileged to move in 1962, with an adequate staff into a lovely, modern building. Five years later, the Nursery School wing was added. Many thought the building should have been named the Martha Adams Complex, but it was named the Booker T. Washington Complex. A girls' dormitory was named after Martha Adams and the Education, Business and General Studies Building was named after the founder, Charles P. Adams.

When the news of Mama Fie's retirement was publicized, various committees and organizations winced and groaned in utter depression, for Mama Fie, though criticized by many for being domineering as they put it, could relate positively with people and get the job done. Some of the committees that expressed a deep sense of regret over her retirement were: the Discipline, Adult Education, College Housing and Safety. Mama Fie worked as sponsor of various classes, especially the Senior classes.

Inspite of Mama Fie's many responsibilities, she had taken time to serve as consultant, judge, and guest speaker for various organizations and groups. She had been a member of the Home Economics' Association, Louisiana Home Economics Association, American Vocational Association, Louisiana Vocational Association and National Association of Home Economics Administrators. This human dynamo, with a "find a way or make one," was an inspiration and help to teachers throughout the State. Teachers looked to her for leadership and

guidance, especially for the development of the New Homemakers of America (NHA) which merged in 1965, with the Future Homemakers of America (FHA).

She had also been a dynamic director of Head Start Teacher Training Programs. These organizations also expressed sorrow for they realized that a doer, not a complainer--one who would light a candle rather than curse the darkness was leaving the scene of formal, organized campus routine, disruptions, and concomitant problems.

Retirement Years

Fidelia Adams Johnson developed a personal philosophy of life, when she was at Tuskegee Institute. She said that she feels that in order to succeed in life, it is necessary to develop a love and a way with people, that one has to learn how to accept people as they are and get along with people. She believes this to be her strong point because she can deal with people in a positive manner. Because of her ability to work with people, she has been able to get the cooperation of persons in all components of society. She explained that because she likes to help people, many think that she is either being exploited or domineering. She does not feel either of these attitudes. Therefore, her retirement years up to this year, 1978, have been filled with involvement and active participation in many facets of human relationship.

It would be highly suspected that Mama Fie would quickly involve herself in organizing the retired teachers of the local area in a structured formal body. In 1971, this far-sighted, energetic lady was elected president and is president at this time. A stimulating monthly meeting featuring speakers knowledgeable on current topics is held. Community and social activities are experienced including the annual celebration in the form of a banquet listening to some noted speaker. They early affiliated themselves with the National Retired Teachers Association.

Certainly, worthy of specific mention are the two Defensive Driving courses, one held December of 1975 and the other May, 1977. These courses are devised by the National Safety Council that this group shared with over six million other drivers who have taken this course and learned the principles of accident avoidance driving as well as safe driving techniques. The workshops were conducted by Mr. Aubrey Land, Mr. Robert Poe, teacher of Driver Education, and F. O. Johnson. Those conducting the course previously received instructions in a briefing session held by National Retired Teaches Association in Shreveport. Her volunteer leadership capabilities and her keen ability to do critical and analytical thinking have been so outstanding that in 1975, she served on the state budget committee, and in 1976, Mrs. Johnson was appointed as Assistant to the State Director of the National Retired Teachers Association. This position places her on the Executive Committee and fills much of her time traveling to and attending orientation and area leadership conferences.

This unbelievable person makes time for her church afiliation. The Catholic Church, St. Benedict, is the church that so richly benefits from her services. As late as March 8, 1978, Fie was making alter clothes, robes, a set in red and one in gold, while talking freely in an interview session. The session was interrupted when Father Jim (James Lyke) called to check on the progress of completion of the task; he wanted one set for Psalm Sunday and one for Easter. She had about finished the set that she did not need until Easter instead of the set he wanted almost immediately. She just smiled and said, "All right Father; they will be ready." Other involvement in the church can be summed up by saying if it need to be done, Fie will be in the thick of it, finding a way to get it done.

Her sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, has for many years been deeply indebted to Fie. In fact, there really are no words to express the value of her service to this group. She started the Graduate Chapter on campus in 1952. She has

rendered immeasurably to both the undergraduate and the graduate chapters. She has won many awards, including the Baselius Award and the South Central Region's Graduate Good Citizenship Award in 1976. She is still chairman of the Debutante Committee. She also works untiringly with the Sub-Debs. It must be remembered that it was largely due to her efforts that this facet of the Alpha Kappa Alpha program was developed in this vicinity. This thrust was initiated to encourage a larger population of young girls to participate in cultural enrichment experiences as well as to become more knowlegeable of the social graces.

Other community activities in which she engages include her work with Women In Community Service, an organization gravely concerned about young women in poverty in this period of national crisis. She plans and distributes low income menus in the local area. Scouting still claims a portion of her attention. She attempted to free herself of this responsibility, but real tears were shed and she reconsidered. In 1974, this extraordinary individual was awarded a high honor in Scouting. A neighborhood chairman for the Grambling Girl Scouts, she was awarded by the Pelican Council a silver plate with the Girl Scout Insignia inscribed on it. Part of her estate is used for Girl Scout Day Camp.

Fie has remained loyal and dedicated to Grambling the community as well as the institution, even though her father was not at its helm after 1936. She makes regularly scheduled Alumni visitations seeking to recruit students. She visits the campus each semester and addresses students in Orientation classes. She continues her membership on the Lincoln Parish Welfare Board.

It has been so clearly evident that the dedication to Grambling overflowed and impacted upon the state and national level in a significantly, overwhelmingly positive manner. This affable, genteel lady's life should inspire and motivate highly those of us born with sparse or limited material assets to

reflect that where there is a will, there is a way. If there seems not to be a way, find one or improvise one, and use our obstacles for stepping stones. Love and serve others for in so doing one is in turn enriched.

In summary, it is documented that Fidelia Adams Johnson is a descendant of a line of educators and leaders, but certainly born on the opposite side of affluency. This factor never seemed to daunt her. She worked extremely hard for her education, and the development of her beloved Home Economics Department, to place herself and a needed curricula in position to help others. She has been a leading Louisiana educator for over four decades, a staunch totally committed community, religious, fraternal, and social worker; a devoted and understanding "mother" to hundreds of persons now themselves successfully achieving in the world of work throughout the nation. This distinguished American must be undeniably considered an ingenious personality--and she is the daughter of Charles P. and Martha Adams, founder and co-founder of Grambling State University. She happens also to be the granddaughter of Lewis Adams, chiefly responsible for moving Booker T. Washington and Tuskegee upon the pages of distinguished history. Fidelia, Olin, Fie, Mama Fie, your deeds should be recorded; posterity should be privileged to know about you and salute you for the place that you carved for yourself in the annals of time and history.

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